

SITUATION REPORT NO. 01
INCIDENT NO. 2000-080
DATE: August 28, 2000 TIME: 4:00 p.m.

TO: Governor Edward T. Schafer
State Capitol
Bismarck, N.D. 58505

1. NATURE OF DISASTER: Western North Dakota Wildfires – Dry lightning that accompanied storms on August 26 caused a series of wildfires throughout the Little Missouri National Grasslands and the Badlands.
2. DEATHS AND INJURIES: No deaths or injuries have been reported.
3. DAMAGES: Lightning that accompanied thunderstorms the evening of August 26 sparked approximately 25 fires in western North Dakota, requiring extensive firefighting efforts to control their spread. Severe weather statements, issued that evening by the National Weather Service (NWS), advised that lightning and strong winds would start and spread fires easily given the dry conditions in the western part of the state. After the storm moved through the area, the NWS reported numerous prairie fires west of Dickinson. These fires reduced visibility to one-half mile at times along I-94, between Beach and Belfield. Heavy rains helped to extinguish some of the fires; however, the remaining fires required local and federal response from fire crews throughout the region.

Firefighters expect northwest wind gusts today of 30 miles per hour cause flare-ups. The Rangeland Fire Danger Statement places Golden Valley, Billings, Slope and Bowman counties in the very high category, and Divide, Williams, McKenzie, Dunn, Stark, Hettinger and Adams counties in the high category. The forecast also calls for cooler temperatures with highs in the mid 70s to lower 80s. This evening, conditions will be mostly clear, and lows will be in the 40s to around 50. Wind speeds will drop after 7:00 p.m.

As of August 28, firefighters are working to control two large fires in the Blacktail area of the Little Missouri National Grasslands and in Painted Canyon in the Badlands. Updates on these fires are as follows:

Blacktail Fires: Fires in this area have burned 1,500 acres of federal and private land in the Blacktail Creek drainage area on the Little Missouri National Grasslands. The Billings County Emergency Manager reported that the fires are under control. While the fires are no longer making runs, crews expect to be on scene for two days, extinguishing hot spots and wind-driven flare-ups. No structures are threatened by the fires at this time. These fires remained active last night as firefighters observed increases in tree torching. The fire began moving

toward Blacktail Road, which firefighters hope will serve as a barrier. Billings County fire officials reported that rugged terrain was making it difficult to reach "deep pockets" of cedar. Response to this fire required up to 100 firefighters from Billings County and surrounding areas. Sixty of these firefighters remained on scene today. Federal assets assigned to the fire include one 20-member Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) hand crew and 10 engine crews from four agencies -- the U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife, National Park Service and BIA. Firefighting strategies for today include fire retardant, foam and water drops from a helicopter with a 300-gallon capacity and a single engine air tanker with a 600-gallon capacity. These aviation resources, operated by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), will be based in Dickinson.

Painted Canyon Fire: Approximately 450 acres have burned in the Painted Canyon area of the Badlands. Aviation resources dropped water on these fires yesterday. Hand crews responding to the fire include the National Park Service, Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa and the Three Affiliated Tribes of the Fort Berthold Reservation.

Fires in other Counties:

Bowman: A couple of small grass fires were reported south of Rhame, but were quickly extinguished.

Dunn: A couple of very small grass fires were also quickly extinguished on Saturday.

Golden Valley: Eight small grass fires burned approximately 750 acres, mostly around the Sentinel Butte area.

McKenzie: A five-acre grass fire was reported at the Summit Campground south of Theodore Roosevelt National Park. This fire was extinguished by Grassy Butte firefighters.

Stark: Four grass fires were reported on August 26-27 with the largest occurring four miles north and one mile east of Belfield. This fire destroyed approximately 400 tons of hay and burned a shelterbelt that surrounded a farm. A second fire, located five miles north and six miles east of Dickinson, burned approximately 300 acres of Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) land and other grasses. Fires near Gladstone and near Richardton caused minimum damage. A bolt of lightning hit a baler that was being pulled by a tractor. The farmer was able to disconnect the baler so that no damage occurred to the tractor. The baler was destroyed.

4. RESOURCES:

LOCAL: Local agencies contributing to response efforts include sheriff's deputies, city police departments, city and rural fire departments, emergency managers, communications centers, ambulance services, city and county commissions and administrative offices.

STATE: State Radio Communications, N.D. Division of Emergency Management and North Dakota National Guard.

FEDERAL: Federal agencies providing firefighting and technical resources include the U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife, Bureau of Indian Affairs, U.S. Park Service and Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa and the Three Affiliated Tribes of the Fort Berthold Reservation.

5. VOLUNTEER ACTION: Four Corners Café in Fairfield has been furnishing coffee and ice to firefighters in Billings County. In addition, the Salvation Army and Belfield and Fairfield residents have made meals for firefighters. Missouri Basin Well Service has provided water tankers. Area restaurants and grocery stores have allowed fire crews to charge food.

In Stark County, local farmers volunteered tractors and chisel plows to make fire breaks. Local residents, the Salvation Army and area restaurants and grocery stores donated food.

6. MAJOR ACTIONS: Billings County firefighters have received fire, ambulance and law enforcement assistance from surrounding cities and counties to include, but not limited to: Amidon, Beach, Belfield, Dickinson Rural Fire, Golden Valley County Sheriff's Office, Grassy Butte, Medora Police Department, Sentinel Butte, South Heart, Stark County Sheriff's Office, Watford City and West Dunn.

The U.S. Forest Service and the National Park Service have issued fire restrictions for the Little Missouri Grasslands and the north and south units of the Theodore Roosevelt National Park's south and north units. These restrictions prohibit open camp fires and off-road vehicle use unless such travel is necessary for a business, trade or occupation.

7. ASSISTANCE NEEDED: No state assistance has been requested at this time.
8. OUTSIDE HELP ON SCENE: Officials for the Montana Department of Natural Resources (DNRC) have offered aircraft support.
9. OTHER: Situation Reports published by North Dakota Emergency Management are posted on the Division's Internet home page. The address is:
<http://www.state.nd.us/dem>.

Douglas C. Friez, State Director